



THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING NARRATIVES OF PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH REFUGEES

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper analyzes the key concepts of transformative learning and narrative in the context of social work with refugees and discusses, how these concepts could be used to explore the experiences of practitioners working with refugees. A critical analysis of literature and research studies in relation to the concepts of transformative learning and narrative and the current political and social context led to the development of recommendations for further research and methodological choices for exploring the phenomena of interest.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on the conceptual analysis. Firstly, it aims to discuss the importance of exploring the experiences of practitioners working with refugees in the current social and political context. It analyses and discusses the concepts of transformative learning and narrative and their application in literature and research studies. The paper discusses, the interrelationship between the concepts of transformative learning and narratives and how these concepts could be applied together to get better understanding of complex learning experiences of practitioners working with refugees.

Findings – The experiences of people working with refugees on voluntary or paid basis in various resettlement and integration programs might be diverse and complex. Therefore, it is important to explore such experiences of learning and changes of “self”, which practitioners might experience in their practice. Transformative learning theory is useful for researching such complex, emic experiences of practitioners. The analysis and critical discussion of the concepts of transformative learning and narrative and their application in literature and research studies revealed various interpretations and theories used to explain them. The concept of transformative learning used as change of identity proposed by Illeris (2014) is holistic and not limited to the change of individual consciousness, therefore, it might be useful to explore holistic learning experiences of practitioners. The conceptualization of transformative learning as Third space might also

be useful to explain transformative learning in the context of work with culturally diverse people, balancing ‘in-between’ refugees and the state. The narrative analysis could be a suitable methodology for analyzing transformative learning. However, it is important clearly define, what is meant by the concept of narrative and what narrative approach is used. Transformative learning narratives might be captured and analyzed as constructs created in relationships in a specific time and context and the small story approach can be combined with biographical and contextual approaches to explore the transformative learning experiences.

Research limitations/implications – The research is based on theoretical conceptual analysis and is not presenting any empirical data. The most of selected and analyzed literature sources are from English speaking countries.

Practical implications – The topic is related to a practical problem and social work practice with refugees. The study might be useful for justifying and making practical methodological choices.

Originality/Value – There is a lack of studies exploring transformative learning narratives of practitioners working with refugees. The topic is relevant and important in the current political and social context.

Keywords: transformative learning; narrative; work with refugees

Research type: conceptual paper